

Consensus Decision Making Process Discussion

Consensus decision-making is a [group decision making](#) process that not only seeks the agreement of most participants, but also the resolution or mitigation of minority objections.

[Consensus](#) is defined by Merriam-Webster as, firstly - general agreement and, secondly - group [solidarity](#) of [belief](#) or sentiment.

Objectives

As a decision-making process, consensus decision-making aims to be:

- ❖ **[Inclusive](#)**: As many [stakeholders](#) as possible should be involved in the consensus decision-making process.
- ❖ **[Participatory](#)**: The consensus process should actively solicit the input and participation of all decision-makers
- ❖ **[Collaborative](#)**: Participants contribute to a shared proposal and shape it into a decision that meets the concerns of all group members as much as possible.
- ❖ **[Cooperative](#)**: Participants in an effective consensus process should strive to reach the best possible decision for the group and all of its members, rather than competing for personal preferences.
- ❖ **[Egalitarian](#)**: All members of a consensus decision-making body should be afforded, as much as possible, equal input into the process. All members have the opportunity to present, and amend proposals.
- ❖ **Agreement Seeking**: A consensus decision making process attempts to help participants reach as much agreement as possible.

Alternative to Common Decision-making Practices

[Robert's Rules of Order](#) is a process used by many organizations. The goal of **Robert's Rules** is to structure the debate and passage of proposals that win approval through majority vote. This process does not emphasize the goal of full agreement. Nor does it foster whole group collaboration and the inclusion of minority concerns in resulting proposals. Critics of **Robert's Rules** believe that the process can involve adversarial debate and the formation of competing factions. These dynamics may harm group member relationships and undermine the ability of a group to cooperatively implement a contentious decision.

Consensus decision making is also an alternative to “**top-down**” decision making, commonly practiced in [hierarchical](#) groups. **Top-down** decision making occurs when leaders of a group

make decisions in a way does not include the participation of all interested stakeholders. The leaders may (or may not) gather input, but they do not open the deliberation process to the whole group. Proposals are not collaboratively developed, and full agreement is not a primary objective. Critics of **top-down** decision making believe the process fosters incidence of either complacency or rebellion among disempowered group members. Additionally, the resulting decisions may overlook important concerns of those directly affected. Poor group relationship dynamics and decision implementation problems may result.

Consensus decision making addresses the problems of both Robert's Rules of Order and top-down models. The outcomes of the consensus process include:

- ❖ **Better Decisions:** Through including the input of all stakeholders the resulting proposals can best address all potential concerns.
- ❖ **Better Implementation:** A process that includes and respects all parties, and generates as much agreement as possible sets the stage for greater cooperation in implementing the resulting decisions.
- ❖ **Better Group Relationships:** A cooperative, collaborative group atmosphere fosters greater group cohesion and interpersonal connection.

Process

There are multiple models of how to make decisions by consensus. They vary in the amount of detail the steps describe. They also vary depending on how decisions are finalized. The basic model involves:

- ❖ collaboratively generating a proposal,
- ❖ identifying unsatisfied concerns, and then
- ❖ modifying the proposal to generate as much agreement as possible.

After a concerted attempt at generating full agreement, the group can then apply its final decision rule to determine if the existing level of agreement is sufficient to finalize a decision.